

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for June 6, 2001

Agenda Items

- Review and Approve Southeast Seattle Link Light Rail Design Guidelines
- Follow-up to MLK Corridor Discussion from 5/16

Commissioners Present

Jack Mackie
Carolyn Law

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Cheryl Sizov, CityDesign
Kathy A Dockins, CityDesign
Marty Curry, Planning Commission

In Rick Sundberg's absence, Cheryl Sizov chaired the meeting. Due to lack of a quorum, meeting notes could not be approved. Those members present asked Cheryl to conduct a review of the meeting notes via e-mail and/or telephone calls, in order to get both sets approved within the next week.

Follow-up to MLK Corridor Discussion from 5/16

Cheryl recapped the issues discussed at the May 16th LRRP meeting, and asked John Walser to update the Panel on MLK Corridor staff coordination. John noted that Ron Lewis has expressed concern about the issue of wood utility poles along MLK, as well as concern about time often spent going over decisions that have already been made. City and Sound Transit staffs have since met to discuss: landscape, street furniture, paving, and decisions (who they rest with and who has made them to date).

The consensus among staff and Panel members is that we need to go back and look at the big picture; set aside the time and be willing to re-examine the urban design opportunities along the MLK Corridor. There will be another staff coordination meeting next week, and it would be helpful if City staff could help support an effort to meet our earlier commitments to the public for a quality design for the Corridor. There is a concern that as we move into plan review, we are revisiting decisions that run contrary to the overall intent or vision for the MLK Corridor. Ron at Sound Transit is concerned about what the public has been shown versus what we have now.

Debora mentioned that maintenance is another issue, and we need to negotiate this soon, because whomever ends up maintaining the system—or specific aspects of it—will clearly want a voice in how it is designed. Cheryl then added that that is a nice segue into the Draft Letter to the Sound Transit Board regarding LRRP's belief in the importance of quality urban design to the Link project. As there was no quorum, Panel members and staff proceeded to discuss the letter, but took no action. The key points are summarized as follows:

Discussion

- The success of the letter hinges on timing. If it can get us somewhere by September, it will work well, and dovetail with the pending Board decision on the south alignment. Once the decision is made, Sound Transit will have to move fast with design, and we won't have the luxury of discussing these urban design issues as deliberately as we have to date.

- The letter reads well, but the specific urban design concerns might be too vague to those who have not been a part of our meeting process.
- Since Sound Transit is sensitive about "jargon", I think this letter is appropriate (as it's not jargon-filled). People will be drawn to the quote in the letter, and that if that's all they read, it still contains the key points and speaks to the issues in the entire letter.
- I think the letter should be more specific and include examples, since we know what our specific issues are (trees, landscaping, etc). Otherwise, "good urban design" is nothing more than a cliché.
- Will the Boardmembers actually read the entire letter?
- Probably not, but a bulleted letter with specifics might work.
- As written, I think the Board won't know what you are specifically concerned about. The letter needs to be more concise.
- How specific do we need to be? Landscaping? Trees?
- Definitely talk about trees, and also discuss a few other examples.
- Examples are better than absolutes; if we lay down absolutes we have limited flexibility.
- Focus on the MLK Corridor design "vision" set forth by Sasaki; add the design principles; then illustrate with examples. The issue goes beyond the scope of what Sound Transit can deal with.
- If the Board reads the letter clearly, they won't be able to understand where the problem lies. They need examples with which they're already familiar.
- Streamline it, and make it more concise, not necessarily shorter – condense the information. No matter which piece is built first, it will be a symbol of the whole system.

Cheryl closed discussion of the letter by saying that lead paragraph and vision statement are the most important parts of the letter, to be followed by specifics. She will re-work the letter and e-mail it to everyone.

Southeast Seattle Link Light Rail Design Guidelines

Cheryl began by reminding the Panel that as we have no quorum, we can discuss but not vote on the guidelines. She introduced Helen Shawcroft from the University of Washington, who had previously submitted comments on the design guidelines for the McClellan Station as they relate to the U.W. laundry facility nearby. Helen recapped the University's history of ownership and use of the site, long-term plans, and interests, including the following key points:

- The UW Laundry serves several U.W. and other hospital facilities, so they have a vested interest in the guidelines for that station. Sound Transit will be acquiring the parking lot in order to use it for construction staging.
- We moved to that facility 16 years ago at the City's urging; they have made capital investments in the area, and have created 100 jobs, so the laundry is making a substantial financial contribution to the area, and UW wants to stay there.
- Neighborhood planning recognized the Laundry in its long-term planning; we've been following the Sound Transit work to ensure a similar recognition of the Laundry's place in this community.
- There are realities of truck traffic and circulation to address, separate from pedestrian circulation issues. We want the Design Guidelines to acknowledge our ongoing use and to reinforce the need to minimize conflicts between truck and station-related circulation (auto, pedestrian, bicycle).
- We have few comments on the landscaping—we support it, but urge you to keep safety in mind too. We need a safe link from the east side of Rainier to our site.

In summary, the U.W. feels that the design guidelines must address several topics, including:

- UW truck traffic versus pedestrian and car traffic
- Incorporating landscaping while keeping safety issues in mind
- A safe link to the bus facility on the east side of Rainier for Laundry employees and others
- The proposed town center, including access to the Value Village property to service the town center
- The likelihood of still having some auto traffic, in spite of light rail, and having to address auto circulation

Cheryl noted that access off the South end of Winthrop is a multi-agency issue and that the Parks Department has been reluctant to support additional vehicle access to date. She said that City staff discussions are continuing on that topic.

Discussion

- Has the U.W. completed expansion of the facility? What are the plans for 5-6 years from now? (*We've decided not to expand to the south.*)
- There are a lot of unknowns; I can see why UW doesn't want to cut off development potential for the future.
- I remember the Panel commenting at length regarding the spaces under the guideway, with the objective of making them available for future retail (at the station).
- Be as broad as possible in planning to allow for flexibility in future development.

Helen Shawcroft ended her comments by saying she is generally pleased with the revised guidelines. As with the meeting notes, it was decided to conduct a telephone vote of Panel members after the meeting.

Sound Transit Board Workbook

Debora presented the Board Workbook, which has gone to the Board. She reviewed four scenarios for starting the light rail system, and discussed the funding scenarios for each one as well as actual routes:

- University Link as per Full Funding Grant Agreement
- Convention Place Station (CPS) to Henderson with local funds only
- CPS to South 200th with local and federal funds, different start/end points depending on coordination with Airport and North King County funding
- Capitol Hill to Henderson using all North King County funding plus additional funding for Boeing Access Road

Each alternative has different ridership numbers. Also gave specifics about where we are on a variety of areas. Board will have a two-hour working session 6/14 and make a decision on the 28th – probably a general decision about what to focus on, then set up a three-month work program. September is a deadline for a final decision for many reasons, including funding and keeping with the 2009 timeline.

Tuck Wilson joined the Panel midway through Debora's presentation, and reminded everyone that Link is in its 11th hour, and that the dates of decision are July 14th, the 20th, and the 28th. The Board is waiting to hear if there is any community consensus on any part of Link and, if so, what part of Link. He said that ST staff will convey that there seems to be some consensus on CPS South to Rainier Valley (scenario 2), but that questions still remain north and south of those

points. Ridership is estimated at only 27,000, which is not great, but other places around the country have started their light rail systems with less! He hopes the Board will conclude that we should start in the center with the plan to expand. The recent shift in the Senate increases the possibility of obtaining Federal funding. The Panel proceeded to ask questions and provide comments as follows:

Discussion

- Would you care to speculate on how the changing Senate may affect this project? (It certainly helps! The new proposal does include part of the original MOS.)
- How is Sound Transit responding to the increase in the number of surface buses? What is the status of the analysis of joint use? (*A study of joint use is proceeding—we are simulating it now. The question is, how many buses can be sequenced in with the trains? 40-50? Today there are 70 buses in the tunnel.*)
- Are there any transfers planned at CPS? (*Mike Williams is best able to answer that, but I do know that a couple of scenarios do intersect here.*)
- It's important to ascertain public commitment. Is it cumulative, or are we hearing just what the meeting attendees think (especially on 6/20)? How do we account for the opinions of those who don't necessarily attend public meetings, but may have voted for light rail? (*We're in a precarious spot where ambivalence about the project may overpower power/reason. This is the time for the host city of this corridor to make itself heard.*)
- So we need a LRRP presence on the 14th, 20th, & 28th. Are we saying that we're moving forward with a specific proposal, or just that we're moving forward? What does the Panel want to say?
- Alignment selection isn't our purview per se, but we can point out that quality of design and care for passengers are critical no matter which alignment is selected.
- We have always supported Light Rail; critical design review doesn't obscure that fact.
- We should send the message that we believe fundamentally that the Puget Sound region desperately needs a light rail system. Should we also send a letter to the editor of the newspaper? The larger community needs to see that now. Might also translate to Board (?). Voices need to be raised.
- Let's have a letter sent with signatures from all three Commissions and coordinate attendance at all three meetings. (*The Board is splintered!*)

With this, the Panel concluded its discussion, and directed Cheryl to prepare a revised letter to the Sound Transit Board, along with a letter to the editor for publication in the Seattle Times or PI.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.